

Getting to Know You

A Biblical Study of Friendship

By Earl Cooper, Ph.D.

THE INTENT OF THIS BOOK

This book has been designed specifically for cell group studies within the body of believers of a local church. The intent is to create an environment of Christian caring among those believers who have something uniquely in common such the community they live in, or a need which they share, or similar circumstances which affect their lives.

This sense of caring has two God appointed purposes. First, believers are to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) as well as stir one another to "love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). The best environment to achieve this is within a closely knit group where friendship can develop and where a strong sense of brotherly care can flourish. Cell groups are able to maintain this relationship level regardless of the size of a church.

The second purpose for developing this sense of caring, particularly within a common geographical community is the impact this has on the unsaved world. Jesus stated: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35 NIV). Love expressed within the body is a great influence in drawing the unsaved to Christ. Cell meetings within small communities that achieve a mutual caring will demonstrate love and therefore attract people to Christ.

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

The effectiveness of the cell group studies to fulfil their purpose largely depends on the participants coming to each group session prepared to share and worship. The study book is just a tool to bring people into contact with the Word of God in a common theme. To receive the most out of the study the following study habits are suggested:

1. Set aside a time each day to work through three or four questions from each study. (Divide up the number of questions in each lesson keeping the study time prior to the cell group meeting for review)
2. Pray before you begin, asking God to give you understanding of His Word as well as personal application.
3. Although the texts are provided in the manual, it is recommended that a Bible with clear paragraph divisions be used and that the paragraphs of the text be read in their entirety before answering the related question. (Unless indicated the texts are listed before the related questions.)
4. Mark any question that is unclear or any area of particular interest for discussion purposes at the meetings and be ready to draw the groups attention to these areas.
5. Try to be as personal and practical as possible especially in the "conclusion" sections where application is emphasized.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADERS

This study is designed as a discussion guide and therefore contains more material in each lesson than can be covered in one thirty minute sharing time. To receive the most benefit from the study in the meeting time the following procedure is suggested:

1. Be sure to complete the studies personally as a participant. (See above).
2. Ask the Lord to give you a sense of your groups special needs as you work through the study and identify those areas in each lesson that are particularly meaningful to the group.
3. Let the group have input in the areas they wish to discuss before leading your group to discuss the areas you have identified as special, There may be times that your areas are not even covered. Ask God for wisdom to help you keep the discussions meaningful, regardless of the areas brought forth.
4. Don't try to be an expert with all the answers, rely on the Holy Spirit to speak through you. Have fun and be enthused!

May God bless each participant with a thirst for the Word, and a wonderful enriching of His presence in your studies and in your fellowship.

Earl Cooper, Ph.D.

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

INTRODUCTION

Most amateur sports enthusiasts, in playing golf, do better in the long game than the short. It appears to be easier to drive a ball a distance in a general direction than to lob a ball a short specific direction. This has its own parallel in life! The distant relationships seem easy to manage but as relationships move toward the inner circle of comfort, mankind has an unavoidable tendency to "smack each other with the clubs".

One of the Churches greatest challenges is to become aware of the high calling of God in all human relationships. The poet speculated on the necessity of relations by stating: "no man is an island", God emphasised the importance of relationships in these foundational words: "It is not good that man should be alone".

The purpose of this study is to bring the believer into a deeper awareness and appreciation of the friendship especially as it relates to the Christian life. It is imperative that the church regain its commitment to one another and to the community as a caring and loving people. Loneliness is one of the growing ailments in our society. Modern technology as well as career trends have created 'introvertish' communities. Today's family is 'cocooning' in its self sufficient environment. As a result the development the opportunity for growing relationships is stifled.

To this end each believer must assess his own role in the community with the prophets question: "Is there balm (healing) in Gilead (among the people of God)". If in our own communities the evidence of the love of Christ among God's own people is conspicuously absent, then we have failed to be the epistles to the world that God wants us to be. It was the love among the early Christians that turned the hearts of the unsaved toward God: "They shall know we are Christians by our love!"

LESSON ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS

TEXT:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29 NIV)

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10 NIV)

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- (John 1:12 NIV)

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of

God through faith in Christ Jesus, (Galatians 3:25-26 NIV)

1. In terms of relationship, what is God's intention for each believer?

TEXT:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men. (Luke 2:52 NIV)

2. In what areas did Jesus develop?

3. What specific relational dimensions are mentioned?

4. Comment on the significance of the order of "Relationship" → 1st - Favour with God, 2nd - Favour with Man:

TEXT:

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." (John 4:32 NIV)

5. Comment on your understanding of the place of "Nourishment" in the believers life as modelled by Jesus:

THE ORDER OF RELATIONSHIPS

TEXT:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

6. State in your own words what the single focus of a believers life is:

The Glory of God referred to in scripture is the visible manifestation as light of all that God is in perfection, power and personality. To glorify Him is to show Him to be all that He truly is in all of our lives.

7. What do you think it means to "glorify God in all things"?

Since the single focus of our lives is "Do all to the Glory of God!", all personal relationships (Horizontal - people to people) must have this vertical goal (vertical goal = Glorify God). To achieve this each believer must make a personal commitment to a deepening relationship with God. In interpersonal relationships this means following God's own plan for relationships.

TEXT:

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. (James 2:23 NIV)

8. How is Abraham's relationship described?

9. On what was Abraham's relationship with God based?

With Abraham, who is called the father of the faith, this deepening relationship with God is called "friendship". The first step in understanding interpersonal relationships is to understand this privilege which "people of faith" have. That is where this study will lead.

CONCLUSION

10. What has this study taught you about God's desired relationship with mankind?

11. What should mankind's desire toward God be?

12. What is man's desire toward God in general?

13. What are your reasons for answer 12?

14. What have you learned from this study that has affected you personally?

LESSON TWO

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

In the frenzy of daily routine and people problems, my mind can capture a picture of peace and serenity by returning to my boyhood days of farm living. I picture myself sitting on the rail fence in southern Ontario watching the cows pasture quietly in the field as a breeze passes over the long grass giving the impression of a gently rolling sea. The closest thing to violent activity is the occasional flick of a tail or twitch of an ear by a cow to chase away flies. Peace prevails.

The shepherds of Israel must have found a similar peace among the flocks of sheep because their word for pasturing grew to represent the best of life's peaceful coexistence among fellow human beings. The idea of sheep or cattle grazing side by side (rah-gah) grew to include the tranquillity of two standing together in peace and harmony (rah-yah), and is translated into the English language as "companion", "friend", "neighbour".

To this beautiful expression of human relationship, God adds His own standard of excellence. Because man is made in the image of God, the true meaning of friendship can only be found in terms of God's friendship toward man.

THE PATTERN OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP TOWARD MAN

God's pattern of friendship begins with "SECURITY":

TEXT:

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17 NIV)

1. How does God describe a true friend?

TEXT:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NIV)

2. How did God demonstrate this pattern of friendship?

TEXT:

The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends. (Proverbs 14:20 NIV)

5. How is this pattern of friendship contrasted to the world's?

The world's philosophy of friendship says "What you have is important, not who you are." This pattern of conditional friendship is shallow and ungodly. Yet, parents often reinforce the world's pattern by being demanding without showing affection, or when rewarding good behaviour by affection and bad behaviour by rejection.

6. How would you assess the pattern of friendship expressed in your home, your workplace, your community?

TEXT:

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8 NIV)

6. How is God's pattern of unconditional love characterized by Christ beyond His death for us?

7. How can you apply this example of unconditional love in your life?

CONCLUSION

8. How is God's unconditional love a source of security in the life of a Christian?

9. Why is the unconditional love of true friendship valuable?

10. What personal challenges has this study brought to you?

LESSON THREE

THE PATTERN OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP TOWARD MAN

In the previous lesson we discovered that God's pattern of friendship began with _____ . This lesson explores how God's pattern of friendship involves "RESPONSIBILITY".

TEXT:

Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you--better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away. (Proverbs 27:10 NIV)

1. How is the responsibility of friendship stated here?

God's pattern of friendship is the responsibility of responding to need. In essence, it is UNCONDITIONAL LOVE EXEMPLIFIED by a believer toward others in a loyalty that accepts responsibility when a friend is in need.

TEXT:

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24 NIV)

2. To what level does God raise the responsibility of friendship?

3. How did God model this in the following?

TOWARD DAVID:

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. (Psalms 27:10 NIV)

TOWARD ELIJAH:

5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. (1 Kings 19 NIV)

TOWARD STEPHEN:

55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. (Acts 7 NIV)

4. How did the following people of God model the responsibility of friendship?

Jonathan the Prince:

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. (1 Samuel 19:4 NIV)

John the Apostle:

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19 NIV)

Barnabas the Missionary:

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, (Acts 15 NIV)

TEXT:

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,*
- 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
- 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
- 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*
- 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalms 23 NIV)*

5. Identify what need the Lord meets in each of the above verses as our "Good Shepherd"?

vs. 1 _____

vs. 2 _____

vs. 3 _____

vs. 4 _____

vs. 5 _____

vs. 6 _____

6. How is this Psalm a model to believers of God's pattern of friendship which accepts responsibility of those in need?

CONCLUSION

7. How have these texts helped you understand God's pattern of friendship's responsibility?

8. What specific responsibility is God calling you to as a friend?

9. What have you learned in this study that is personally meaningful?

LESSON FOUR

THE PATTERN OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP TOWARD MAN

So far our quest for finding the pattern of God's friendship toward man has lead us to discover that God's pattern of friendship begins with _____, and God's pattern of friendship involves _____. This lesson begins with a look at God's pattern of friendship as a call to "VULNERABILITY".

TEXT:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13 NIV)

1. To what new height has God raised the call of friendship?

Although few in North America would risk death as a result of commitment to God's pattern of friendship, there are many each year in other parts of the world who are completely vulnerable, even to the point of death. God's call of friendship is to an attitude of willingness to lay down our lives even as He laid down His own. This is UNCONDITIONAL LOVE EXPRESSED to the highest degree of vulnerability.

TEXT:

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Peter 5 NIV)

2. In your own words, define this text's teaching about the Fellowship of Suffering among believers:

3. How is this fellowship of suffering characterized in the following texts?

1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. 2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him. (1 Samuel 22 NIV)

9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. 10 When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2 Samuel 11 NIV)

1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (2 Corinthians 8 NIV)

TEXT:

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5 NIV)

David's men suffered with Him as outcasts in their own country as he ran from King Saul. Early believers suffered with the apostles in great persecution as the gospel spread throughout the land. Many believers today understand this fellowship of suffering; people like Dr. Paul Brand who

has spent his entire Christian carrier among lepers, and Mother Theresa, who has joined the poorest of this world for the sake of friendship with Christ.

TEXT:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Galatians 3:13 NIV)

4. How did Christ model this vulnerability?

TEXT:

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (John 15 NIV)

5. What did Jesus say about His call to vulnerability?

TEXT:

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3 NIV)

6. How did Paul view this fellowship of suffering?

For the believer, the fellowship of suffering is a commitment to participate in the suffering of Christ. It is to say; "I stand with Christ, therefore I'm as vulnerable as Christ." This pattern of friendship is focused on the Cross where Christ died for us. The vulnerability of the cross, in which Christ bore our sin and our shame through suffering and death, was the price of man's restored friendship with God. He laid down his life for us; he rightfully asks: "How far will you go for friendship - to death?"

CONCLUSION

7. These first lessons have focused on the study of God's pattern of friendship. Summarize what you understand these patterns to be:

God's pattern of friendship begins with SECURITY:

God's pattern of friendship involves RESPONSIBILITY:

God's pattern of friendship is a call to VULNERABILITY:

TEXT:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (Galatians 5:22 NIV)

8. In each of these identifiable patterns the unconditional love of God was foremost. According to Galatians 5:22, why are these patterns the potential of each believer?

When their oil rig, the Progress Marine No. 2, capsized and overturned in the Gulf of Mexico in June of 1975, Darrel J. Dore managed to survive living on the oxygen in the air bubble about fifty feet below the surface. As skin divers sought to rescue Dore and eleven others, they managed to get a supply of oxygen pumped to the rig to replenish the supply of oxygen until escape was possible. After his rescue Dore said: "I gave up hope three or four times and then all of a sudden there was a hand reaching down for me."ⁱ

Into our planet, submerged under the wrath of a righteous God, has come a supply of new life in the Gospel. There is a hand reaching out to every weary sinner who has given up hope; that hand is Christ's. He is both willing and able to save all who come unto God by Him, extending friendship's offer to each one. Can His call to friendship be any less of a commitment when He Himself abides in the believers heart?

Entering through faith into that relationship of "Sonship" bestows in every believers heart the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit manifests Himself in a life by producing Godliness, the Christian is afforded the potential for true expressions of friendship in God's pattern, toward God and man. Consider now the privileges of friendship with God.

LESSON FIVE

THE PRIVILEGES OF MAN'S FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Shortly before his death, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote *Youth and Age* in which he reflected over his past and the strength of his earlier years. He wrote "Friendship is a sheltering tree ...".ⁱⁱ To have friendship with God is to the reality of the Lord as a sheltering tree. David was a man "after God's own heart". In his trials he came to realize the special friendship of God that assured him of God's care:

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. (Psalms 9:9 NIV)

David repeated that thought forty-four times in the Psalms. Like David, those who know the Lord and are given opportunity for a special status of friendship with God. The care that David realized, they can know. This sense of "sheltering tree" carries unique privileges. Jesus shared these specifically with his disciples:

TEXT:

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other. (John 15 NIV)

Friendship with God brings specific privileges.

First, there is the privilege of the PERCEPTION OF TRUTH.

1. What distinction did Jesus make between friends and servants (vs. 15)?

2. What did Jesus share as a privilege of friendship with him (vs. 15)?

Jesus emphasizes the difference between servants who simply do what they are told with no explanation, and friends who are given the plans and insights of the Lord.

TEXT:

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1 NIV)

3. By what means does God give His plans and insights in these last days?

TEXT:

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. (Hebrews 2:3 NIV)

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. (Jude 1:3 NIV)

4. How has God brought this message from Christ down to us today?

TEXT:

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1 NIV)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV)

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18 NIV)

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Revelation 22 NIV)

5. Write out your observations regarding what scriptures say about the process and product of God giving us His Word in written form:

TEXT:

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,

making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. (Psalms 19 NIV)

6. What blessings are available to the believer through the Word of God?

TEXT:

Thy word [is] a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalms 119:105)

7. What protection is available to the believer through the word?

TEXT:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14 NIV)

8. What is the prerequisite for understanding God's truth?

TEXT:

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:27 NIV)

9. What is the promise to every believer in 1 John 2:27?

TEXT:

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies [are] my meditation. (Psalms 119:99)

10. What does David say about the value of meditating on the Word of God?

Consider the privilege of having God's Word (His Truth) and God's Spirit (The Teacher). First, the believer who studies the Word has the Key to Natural Science because he/she has a personal relationship with the Creator. Only through the accuracy of scripture history can an accurate understanding of scientific data be arrived at.

Although atheistic scientists believe that the world we live in has always existed under the same natural laws, the scriptures speak of two previous worlds entirely different from ours. First there was the world of Eden where Adam and Eve dwelt without sin and without death. The second world existed after sin entered but before the flood, a time when a vapour canopy circled the earth and men lived for 900 years.ⁱⁱⁱ

11. How might these truths affect the interpretation of scientific evidence?

Secondly, the believer who studies the Word has the Key to Human Framework.

TEXT:

9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (Jeremiah 17 NIV)

12. Who really knows man?

TEXT:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NIV)

13. What has God given man that he might come to know himself?

TEXT:

1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. (1 Thessalonians 5 NIV)

14. What other key is available for the believer through Bible study?

God has laid out his plans and, through the Word, they can be understood by His friends. This is privilege of understanding which goes beyond all the wisdom of great minds of world.

CONCLUSION:

15. What have you learned from this study?

LESSON SIX

THE PRIVILEGES OF MAN'S FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

We have discovered from our text of John 15 that friendship with God secures the privilege of the PERCEPTION OF TRUTH. There is also the privilege of the PERSONIFICATION OF CHRIST.

TEXT:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. (John 15:16 NIV)

1. What is the promise to every believer?

TEXT:

1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3 NIV)

2. What does God say will happen to every believer when he sees Jesus face to face?

God has promised that we shall be like Jesus in Glory. There we will not be burdened with the weakness of sin nor confined to the limitations of natural laws. We shall be truly free to soar as a bird and discern all truth without the foggy spectacles of human depravity. Although this is a time to look forward to with longing, the believer also has the special privilege in this life of being made like Christ.

TEXT:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same

image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

3. What are the implications of the previous text as related to a believer's changing character.

4. Whose character is produced in the believer's life?

TEXT:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (Galatians 5:22 NIV)

5. To what is this changing character compared?

As a grape vine produces clusters of grapes on a single strand of vine and is seen as a unit, so the fruit of the Spirit is singular (fruit) yet multiple (love, joy, etc.).

6. With the texts provided, comment on the effect of each characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit in a believers life:

LOVE

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:5 NIV)

JOY

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10 NIV)

PEACE

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27 NIV)

LONGSUFFERING

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have

great endurance and patience, and joyfully (Colossians 1:11 NIV)

GENTLENESS

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32 NIV)

GOODNESS

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (Romans 15:14 NIV)

FAITH

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

MEEKNESS

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you-- I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! (2 Corinthians 10:1 NIV)

TEMPERANCE

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24 NIV)

TEXT:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 NIV)

7. What is the condition necessary for fruit being produced in the believer?

TEXT:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16 NIV)

8. What did Jesus say about the fruit that he would produce in a believer?

The privilege of friendship is the character of Jesus in our lives now! Jesus declares that this fruit "should remain". This means that it shall be permanent and have lasting effect. Fruit has one purpose, to reproduce after its kind ! The privilege of remaining fruit is the heritage we pass on to the next generation. A heritage of continued salvation and Christlikeness in our children and grandchildren after us!

CONCLUSION

9. Comment on your perception of the growing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life:

10. How has this study helped you?

LESSON SEVEN

THE PRIVILEGES OF MAN'S FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

We have discovered from our text of John 15 that friendship with God secures the privilege of the PERCEPTION OF TRUTH, and the privilege of the PERSONIFICATION OF CHRIST. Now let's examine the privilege of POWER IN PRAYER.

... Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16 NIV)

Have you ever had that "Sense of Confirmation" in your heart that God did something just because you asked? Imagine Elijah's jubilation when after a drought of 3 years and 6 months, he prayed and it rained buckets. Imagine the joy of Moses. God spoke to him face to face as a friend, and through his plea he stopped the hand of God's wrath on Israel. These, being "God's Friends", were led to pray in such a manner and saw the power of God.

TEXT:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16 NIV)

1. Who has this kind of persuasive power of prayer?

TEXT:

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4 NIV)

2. What is the blessing of a believer who will go to God in earnest prayer?

3. In the following texts, identify the "attitude of heart" in approaching God in prayer:

My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. (Psalms 131:1 NIV)

1 Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD, 2 you who minister in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. (Psalms 135 NIV)

I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. (Psalms 142 NIV)

"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, (Matthew 6:9 NIV)

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16 NIV)

TEXT:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16 NIV)

4. In the previous text, is praying in "Jesus name" a formula for guaranteeing that God grants the believer every request? (Comment on the reason for your answer.)

TEXT:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (1 John 5:14 NIV)

5. What is one important truth about believers' requests to God in prayer?

6. How does "praying in God's will" fit the promise of Psalm 17:4?

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4 NIV)

7. What are some other important prerequisites for going to God in prayer found in the following?

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; (Psalms 66:18 NIV)

But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:15 NIV)

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16 NIV)

8. Identify and comment on the perils to avoid in prayer in each of the following texts:

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (Matthew 6:5 NIV)

"Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for you devour widow's houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore you shall receive the greater damnation (Matthew 23:14)

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:3 NIV)

CONCLUSION

9. Write out your evaluation of your present personal prayer life.

10. Write out a commitment to God that focuses on an improved prayer time as a privilege of friendship with God.

11. What are the three privileges that "Friendship With God" affords evident in John 15:15-17?

12. Comment on what each of these privileges means to you now.

LESSON EIGHT

THE PATH OF MAN'S FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

The privileges of friendship with God found in John 15 are worthy of every person's aspirations, however they are not gained by all. Jesus also indicated that there was a specific path in finding these privileges.

The path to Friendship with God begins with God.

Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13 NIV)

1. State in your own words the significance of Christ's death as referred to in each of the following texts:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (1 Peter 3:18 NIV)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV)

Each person must personally accept God's provision of salvation. Like Pilgrim in John Bunyan's "Pilgrims Progress", all must follow the path of repentance and the cross.

2. According to the following text, what does that path of repentance and the cross involve?

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10 NIV)

3. According to the following texts, what new relationships do believers have with God?

Believers are ...

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- (John 1:12 NIV)

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6 NIV)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, (Ephesians 5 NIV)

4. John 15:15-17 declares a specific path that the friend of God must take. Write out the verse that speaks of this path.

Both marriage and society require the interaction of people. This constitutes relationships. It follows then that by God's design, there would be within these institutions of marriage and society, varying levels of relationships or acquaintance, and that somewhere in this range of acquaintance is the wonderful gift from God called friendship.

As expressed in the following poem, man has come to treasure this gift:

There's happiness in little things,
There's joy in passing pleasures,
But friendships are, from year to year
The best of all life's treasures.

Because friendship is a meaningful and purposeful gift from God, believers in particular need to understand God's teaching about friendship.

THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is first of all related to the Believer's PERSONAL CALL:

1. What is the call of a believer as indicated in the following verses?

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29 NIV)

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10 NIV)

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- (John 1:12 NIV)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, (Galatians 3:26 NIV)

In terms of relationship, God defined the believers call as "being made sons of God".

TEXT:

And when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:26 NIV)

2. What did the community of Antioch begin to call the believers?

3. Why do you think the believers were called by this term?

The term "Christian" was probably a derogatory term used to identify believers who adopted a new life style different from the norm. The term suggests "little Christs", and implies the intent of Holy God to perpetuate a family after His own name and manifesting His own character among rebellious mankind.

TEXT:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17 NIV)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31 NIV)

4. In your own words define what the fundamental purpose of a Christian is?

5. Paul reduced all activity of the Christian down to the purpose of glorifying God. State in your own words how "glorifying God" and believer sonship properly go hand in hand in the following text?

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise (glorify) your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

6. In terms of human relationships, who are the people most affected by the "shining light" of the Christian?

Friendship is also related to a believer's PUBLIC CONCERN:

7. How does this text relate sonship's "shining light" to expressing public concern?

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (Matthew 5 NIV)

The Christian's purpose of "bringing glory to God in all things" finds its greatest opportunity through human friendship. Those whom believers know best are the most influenced by them! Therefore, the believers call to sonship is keenly expressed through public concern in declaring the gospel, especially to our friends. No other avenue of reaching the lost has ever been as effective as friend reaching friend.

8. Comment on the relationship that existed between the following people and whom they influenced to follow Christ:

JOHN THE BAPTIST

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" 37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. (John 1 NIV)

ANDREW

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). (John 1 NIV)

PHILIP

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1 NIV)

LEVI

27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. 29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. (Luke 5 NIV)

SAMARITAN WOMAN

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4 NIV)

Although the relationships of the above were varied from brothers to acquaintances, it is clear that each of these had the greatest influence on those who knew them.

CONCLUSION

9. According to this study, what is God's first purpose for friendship?

10. Name two close friends that you know would be influenced by your clear testimony of personal trust in Christ:

11. Plan an opportunity for sitting down undisturbed with each of these friends for the purpose of sharing Christ. Bathe these plans in prayer and go "let your light shine".

LESSON TEN

The Developmental Principles of Friendship

Having the privilege of influencing a friend to accept God's gift of salvation does not fulfil all that God intended friendship to be. The various levels of relationships all carry their own particular responsibilities. In this lesson the levels of friendship are presented^{IV}, with appropriate Biblical principles to examine. Paul desired to be all things to all people that he might win (influence) some, all Christians should view friendship with that same encompassing determination.

THE FIRST LEVEL IS ACQUAINTANCES - THE PRINCIPLE OF "SHOWING"

1. In what way did Jesus "show" the people of his community the Father?

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him]. (John 1:18)

2. In what way do believers "show" all acquaintances the Father?

No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:12 NIV)

Here are some tips to consider in living the principle of showing:

1. Look for new people around you.
2. Smile, be friendly.
3. Learn, remember, and greet them by name.
4. Listen well and ask questions of interest.
5. Let the love of God be expressed through you.

God's love is expressed in kindness with commitment to God's truth and holiness. The love of God is not a compromising expression of affection, but embraces all that God himself loves.

3. Comment on how the early Christians demonstrated the principle of showing:

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2 NIV)

THE SECOND LEVEL IS CASUAL FRIENDS - THE PRINCIPLE OF "SHARING"

4. What is it about our lives that stimulates others to inquiry?

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

5. List some instances in which this hope might be demonstrated in a Christian?

6. In the above text, what is the necessary attitude to have in sharing our hope?

Here are some tips for living out the principle of sharing Christ among our casual acquaintances:

1. Learn their strong points.
2. Learn their ambitions and desires.
3. Listen and demonstrate concern.
4. Learn to be honest with them.
5. Pray for them.

7. Comment on how Paul and Silas demonstrate the principle of sharing:

After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." (Acts 16 NIV)

THE THIRD LEVEL IS CLOSE FRIENDS - PRINCIPLE OF "ENCOURAGING"

8. What are all believers urged to do for one another in the following text?

And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24 NIV)

9. What are some ways that other Christians have encouraged you toward love and good deeds?

10. What two things (as the text go on to state) are necessary for this encouragement to be effective?

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25 NIV)

Here are some suggestions for living out the principle of encouragement among our close friends:

1. Look for potential in their lives.
2. Learn and discuss special goals.
3. List and define (together) hindrances.
4. Find ways to help them achieve sound goals.
5. Use scripture to encourage and direct.

11. Comment on how Aquila and Priscilla demonstrate the principle of encouraging:

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. 27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. 28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18 NIV)

THE FOURTH LEVEL IS INTIMATE FRIENDS - PRINCIPLE OF "BEARING"

12. What did Jesus state the highest commitment to friendship was?

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13 NIV)

3. How does the following parable relate to that same level of commitment?

5 Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11 NIV)

14. In what way does the following text address this commitment?

1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6 NIV)

Here are some ideas for living out the principle of bearing among our intimate friends:

1. Learn to give comfort.
2. Identify and discuss traits and attitudes (good and bad).
3. Be open and honest.
4. Be loyal in all circumstances, having a godly jealousy.
5. Learn, study and apply scripture together.

15. How does Naomi demonstrate this principle of bearing?

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." 16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (Ruth 1 NIV)

CONCLUSION

16. List two individuals you know for each level of friendship.

Acquaintance:

Casual:

Close:

Intimate:

17. Review the principles that apply to these levels and seek to exercise God's desire for you in each.

LESSON ELEVEN

Biblical Priorities in Friendship

Chuck Swindoll, in his book "Growing in the Seasons of Life", shares a quote regarding the real impact of sincere friendship. He says: "I agree with John R. Mott: Rule by the heart. When logic and argument and other forms of persuasion fail, fall back on the heart-genuine friendship."^v

Heart-genuine friendship that results in such an affirmation of confidence must accept the cost of friendship's high priority. God shares these priorities in His Word.

4 Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? 5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. 7 He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet. 8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home. 9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. 10 Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you--better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away. 11 Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart; then I can answer anyone who treats me with contempt. 12 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it. 13 Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; hold it in pledge if he does it for a wayward woman. 14 If a man loudly blesses his neighbour early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse. 15 A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; 16 restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand. 17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27 NIV)

According to the above text, heart-genuine friendship is expressed through four priorities:

1. Loving Concern - v.5-6
2. Sincere Counsel - v.9
3. Sacrificial Commitment - v.10
4. Discerning Consideration - v.14

Let's look at THE PRIORITY OF LOVING CONCERN:

1. Identify the expressions of loving concern in verses 5 and 6:

2. In your own words explain what "the wounds of a friend" are:

3. Explain what the "kisses of an enemy" could involve:

Lets look at THE PRIORITY OF SINCERE COUNSEL:

4. In verse 9, hearty counsel is compared to perfume in delighting the heart. Comment on how a close friend's counsel might be so:

5. Who's counsel should be foremost in our plans?

20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. 21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose (counsel) that prevails. (Proverbs 19 NIV)

6. Sincere counsel is a commitment to sharing God's truth. What does the following text have to offer in the way of qualifying the counsel true friendship gives?

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4 NIV)

Let's look at THE PRIORITY OF SACRIFICIAL COMMITMENT:

7. What is God saying in verse 10 about friendship and hard times?

8. How did the following believers rise to the challenge of this commitment?

TYCHICUS:

Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. (Ephesians 6:21 NIV)

LYDIA:

14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you

consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. (Acts 16 NIV)

BARNABAS:

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4 NIV)

DORCAS:

Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. (Acts 9:39 NIV)

GAIUS:

5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. 6 They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. (3 John 1 NIV)

Let's look at THE PRIORITY OF DISCERNING CONSIDERATION:

9. What is God saying in the following texts about discernment?

If a man loudly blesses his neighbour early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse. (Proverbs 27:14 NIV)

Seldom set foot in your neighbour's house--too much of you, and he will hate you. (Proverbs 25:17 NIV)

10. From the perspective of being a good friend, comment on the necessary areas of discernment suggested in the following verses:

18 Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows 19 is a man who deceives his neighbour and says, "I was only joking!" (Proverbs 26 NIV)

28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends. 29 A violent man entices his neighbour and leads him down a path that is not good. (Proverbs 16 NIV)

CONCLUSION

TEXT:

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17 NIV)

The result of accepting these priorities of friendship is seen in verse 17 - the mutual fine tuning of one another's lives in Christlike character. It can be readily seen that heart-genuine friendship is no small matter. Rather, it comes with a commitment to specific priorities. Those who would aspire to be such friends will be greatly rewarded the mutual fine tuning of one another's lives in Christian character: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17 NIV). Such friendship becomes so much a part of life as to be the very pulse of the heart.

LESSON TWELVE

THE STRONG PULSE OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP

There is one story of friendship in the Bible that is worthy of special study. It is the story of two young men whose lives were brought together under great stress by the leading of God. The story of David and Jonathan expresses the very best of what God intended intimate friendship to be.

In a day when strong ties between people of the same sex are questioned regarding morality, this story brings a fresh spring breeze to our spiritual senses, and awakens God's people to the innocent beauty of the spiritual bond of "kindred spirits". The story is best appreciated read in its entirety. Take time now to put your feet up and read about the strong pulse of true friendship found in 1 Samuel 16 - 20, along with the sad epitaph by David in 2 Samuel 1 - 2.

The Heart of True Friendship Beats With:

THE PULSE OF UNBREAKABLE PARTNERSHIP

1. Describe in your own words the bond between David and Jonathan.

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:1)

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. (1 Samuel 18:1 NIV)

"Knit" in this passage is the translation of the Hebrew "kaw-shar", which means to be bound together, or tied to one another. The same word is used in Job to describe how God "binds" the stars in place. The word describes an unshakeable partnership.

2. How was this unbreakable tie put to the test in David and Jonathan's circumstances?

As Israel was to `bind' the law to their lives so that their thoughts and actions were governed by God's Word (Deut. 6), so Jonathan & David were bound together.

THE PULSE OF UNSHAKEABLE PASSION

3. In what way did Jonathan love David?

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:1)

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. (1 Samuel 18:1 NIV)

The love mentioned here is not sensual, but the deep emotional attachment of true friend. This is "aw-hab", the mortar of true friendship, a love that seemingly fills God's specially built compartment of our heart by friendship. This love is unshakeable.

4. In what ways did this love between Jonathan and David remain unshakeable through the following tests (Identify the tests and comment on the victory of love):

The test of success:

The test of personal loss:

The test of jealousy and hate:

The test of stress:

THE PULSE OF UNMISTAKEABLE PURPOSE

5. Describe, in your own words, the nature of the covenant that David and Jonathan made:

And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. (1 Samuel 18:3 NIV)

As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?" (1 Samuel 20:8 NIV)

This was a Covenant made "before the Lord". Such a covenant implied the clear, unmistakable commitment to God's purpose in which GOD'S WILL and GOD'S WAY were first. Both men were committed to God. Because they each were, by this covenant, bound to Jehovah, they were each bound to the other.

6. Consider the following statements and comment on your agreement or disagreement to each. Explain your reasons:

To Embrace God's Purpose Is To Have God's Best.

To Embrace God's Purpose Often Means Solitude.

To Embrace God's Purpose and Be Joined By Others Forms A Tower of Strength.

CONCLUSION

Frank Lloyd Wright was a world famous architect when he was commissioned to design the Imperial Hotel in Japan. After assessing the land and environmental conditions of the area, he designed the Hotel to "Float on Swamp". Although many looked sceptically at the designs, the building was constructed accordingly. On Sept. 1, 1923 Tokyo suffered a great earthquake in which over 140,000 people died.^{vi}

In the midst of the chaos and destruction there was one oasis of safety, the Imperial Hotel. Because of the superior design, the hotel withstood the earthquake to become a temporary hospital, shelter from ravaging fires, and a fresh water source which saved countless lives.

God intended friendship to be like that hotel. Friendship, built after God's own master design, is a sheltering tree, a refuge during rough seas and an oasis in the midst of a scorched land.

If God has blessed you with that kind of friendship, take time to thank Him. Ask the Lord to help you be that kind of a friend to a brother or sister in the Lord.

FOOTNOTES

- i. From "Mosaic, News You can Use," The Prairie Overcomer, September, 1975.
- ii. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Youth and Age, quoted in Charles Swindoll "A Sheltering Tree," Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1983), p.153
- iii. Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 58-59
- iv. "Basic Seminar Textbook" of Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Taught by Bill Gothard, pp. 177-179
- v. John R. Mott, quoted in Charles Swindoll "Friendly - Inside Out," Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1983), p.97
- vi. Bits & Pieces (New Jersey: Economics Press, 1992) pp. 11-14.